









*CAUDILLO* POLITICS AND DELEGATIVE DEMOCRACY IN THE  
LEADERSHIP OF CHÁVEZ, PUTIN AND BERLUSCONI

by

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## Abstract

Hugo Chávez, Vladimir Putin and Silvio Berlusconi are the flawed leaders of three very different countries. Various elements of structure and agency allow such individuals to attain and maintain power despite their faults. An analysis of Chávez's leadership style, the nature of Venezuelan democracy and Venezuela's political culture sets the pattern for comparison with Putin and Berlusconi. Chávez also provides the basis to explore whether Latin American political concepts such as elected *caudillismo* and delegative democracy may be usefully applied to leaders in other countries. Ultimately, it is the failure of various structural components in Venezuela, Russia and Italy that allow these men to govern. They are all, indeed, elected *caudillos* and Venezuela and Russia are examples of delegative democracy. It is because Berlusconi is considered, by observers, to be a western democratic leader that he escapes the negative judgments heaped on Chávez and Putin.

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**For my grandparents  
Miriam and Ernest Noel**

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## Introduction

Venezuela, Russia and Italy are sovereign states in a world where democracy is defined by western standards. Observers often view two of these countries as examples of failed democracies and the three leaders as either flamboyant playboys or quasi-dictators. Indeed, President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela and former President Vladimir Putin of Russia are regularly viewed as the leaders of authoritarian regimes contributing to the ruination of an entrenched democracy and a fledgling democracy, respectively. Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi of Italy, on the other hand, is generally accepted as the leader of a democratic nation whose time in office has been plagued by numerous legal and personal issues that bring both his honesty and his ability to lead into question.

First-year political science students are taught that democracy means more than voting and having a choice among more than one candidate for public office. It takes some time for such students to comprehend that democracy is a complicated, multi-dimensional concept and that the style of democracy may vary from one country to another. Students are also taught that checks and balances exist to ensure that open and honest elections are held and that the resulting leaders follow specific rules for governance. The most common components of a successful democracy include the constitution, laws, political

parties (both ruling and opposition), institutions, interest groups and civil society. These elements, along with political culture, constitute the structure portion of structure and agency. Agency, on the other hand, is defined as "the faculty of action" (Scruton 2007, 13). In the case of Venezuela, Russia and Italy "action" is taken by political actors who took advantage of particular situations that were open to them. In order to attain and retain power, Chávez, Putin and Berlusconi were able to capitalize on their countries' lack of parties, of party leadership, and of active opposition, within a context characterized by weak structure. These are the common denominators that tie together these three otherwise distinctly different men and their three equally distinct nations.

This thesis will consider which elements of structure and agency allowed individuals such as Chávez, Putin and Berlusconi to emerge as political leaders and continue to gain power despite apparent flaws in their policies, actions and leadership, and whether additional underlying factors contributed to their rise to power.

The thesis will also explore two theories with roots in Latin American politics: elected *caudillismo* and delegative democracy. Both involve a concept of democracy which is slightly removed from traditional liberal democratic theory. A *caudillo* is a dictator with a decidedly Latin American flair. According to Hill

the term has “a resonance that suggests the unique milieu and condition elements of Spanish America” (Hill 1992, 5). In turn *caudillismo* is “the art of obtaining and retaining power through a network of confederates in the manner of many South American politicians” (Scruton 2007, 83). The addition of “elected” created a relatively new term, if not a new political concept, to denote men who govern as *caudillos* but are elected by society. David Close defines elected *caudillismo* as “government by a single – usually charismatic – leader, driven by personal ambitions and with little interest in building any institutions besides his own perpetuation in power ...” (Close 2004, 4).

While Chávez’s detractors would likely place him in this category easily, the term, as used by Close, was meant to apply to leaders such as former President Arnoldo Aléman of Nicaragua. Aléman was the quintessential elected *caudillo* and his leadership style could be nothing except detrimental to democracy in Nicaragua. It should be obvious that no single individual could manage to ruin a country’s democracy without the complicity of the government and other political parties. Given the geographic connotations of the term, political observers would simply prefer to avoid the term elected *caudillo* with reference to either Putin or Berlusconi. However, that does not mean that the term would be inappropriate.

Anyone who studies politics and government has, at some point, struggled to find a suitable definition of democracy. The definitions are numerous and diverse. For the purpose of this thesis, democracy will be defined as "literally, government by the people as a whole rather than by any section, class or interest within it" (Scruton 2007, 169). In the mid 1990s Guillermo O'Donnell described a "new species" among the many existing forms of democracy which he called "delegative democracy" (O'Donnell 1994, 55). He claimed that this new form of democracy is sufficiently different from the others to warrant a new political theory. According to O'Donnell delegative democracy:

"... rests on the premise that whoever wins an election to the presidency is thereby entitled to govern as he or she sees fit, constrained only by the hard facts of existing power relations and by a constitutionally limited term of office. The president is taken to be the embodiment of the nation and the main custodian and definer of interests. The policies of his government need bear no resemblance to the promises of his campaign - has not the president been authorized to govern as he (or she) thinks best?" (O'Donnell 1994, 55-56).

In the most basic sense, a society elects its own dictator to govern as he or she sees fit. The voters accept that their leader will act in the best interest of the people and the nation.

Delegative democracy is often perceived as a weak or defective form of democracy (Merkel 2004, 50). It should not be a foregone conclusion that anything other than strong embedded electoral democracy is undesirable. In this case it should be considered an instance where individuals are free to choose their leader via constitutionally appropriate elections. However, voters choose an individual aside from the political party that the individual is associated with and without particular attention to his background, experience or ability to govern – they vote for the man and nothing more.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the English-language press reported that a substantial number of Venezuelan voters supported Chávez, the man, and believed that he alone could improve the economy and the lives of poor Venezuelans.

It is because Chávez epitomizes elected *caudillos* in established Latin American democracies with failing structures that he is the first leader examined in this thesis. He is the leader against whom Putin and Berlusconi will be measured to assess the viability of transferring Latin American political theories such as elected *caudillismo* and delegative democracy to other leaders and countries around the world. Chávez was elected in accordance to the Venezuelan constitution. He went on to change that constitution, seek re-election twice more and abolish presidential term limits all within the established political rules. He

declared his intention to govern Venezuela indefinitely and that is why, by western standards, he is a dictator who has single-handedly destroyed democracy in Venezuela.

He is a strong charismatic president who expounds on the strengths of average Venezuelans and of Latin America while railing against the United States (US). He has many internal enemies among representatives of the private sector, interest groups and the political opposition but, thus far, Chávez has persevered. Like Putin, Chávez entered elected office with a certain amount of experience dealing with government. In Chávez's case this was due to his time in the military.

Beyond their oil-rich-nation status Venezuela and Russia have little in common. Russia is a former superpower whose fall from grace has been long and devastating. Certainly Russia claims precious little democratic history and her former president cannot claim to have mobilized the nation with his charismatic speeches. However, Putin is a man who led Russia in accordance with his personal vision for the country. He aimed to restore Russia's greatness without particular attention to the consequences of his actions. Like Chávez, he is perceived as a dictator. In this case he has not destroyed existing democracy but

rather he stands accused of obliterating, though perhaps only temporarily, Russia's progress towards democracy.

Also like Chávez, Putin is perceived by many to be anti-American or, at least, anti-NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and anti-West. He, too, faced his share of internal enemies but these have been imprisoned, forced into exile or effectively gagged. Any individual or group that stood against the president faced potentially deadly consequences. Putin was the architect of the tough military and political stance that Yeltsin's government took in its second campaign in Chechnya in September 1999.<sup>2</sup> Putin boldly declared that the Russian forces would "wipe them (the Chechens) out" (Riasanovsky 2005, 625). Average Russians were divided over the conflict in Chechnya. Many supported this military resurgence while others saw no reason to waste the lives of young Russian men in what was perceived to be a hopeless conflict.

However, unlike Chávez, Putin was confronted by a series of occurrences which caused observers to question his ability to lead in times of crisis and claim that old Soviet habits remained. Five months after taking office Putin was faced with the loss of the ballistic missile submarine Kursk.<sup>3</sup> The vacationing Putin did not return to the Kremlin or speak with the families of the lost crew for days. Instead the Kremlin fabricated an alternate version of the events surrounding the

sinking. Only after outcry from the public and the media did Putin act. This was the last time that the media would be permitted to criticize his leadership because the government's media clampdown commenced shortly after this incident.

Both the siege at the Dubrovka Theatre in Moscow and the massacre at the school in Beslan involved Chechen rebels.<sup>4</sup> After the September 2001 attacks in the US these were considered terrorist acts. Putin refused to permit any negotiation with terrorists. A Special Forces unit armed with poison gas was dispatched to the theatre. The government took no responsibility for the deaths of more than one hundred hostages stating that they were not intended to be harmed (Shevtsova 2005, 254). In Beslan, government inactivity and refusal to negotiate with the terrorists led to the deaths of between three and six hundred hostages (Shevtsova 2005, 389). Again the Kremlin chose to present its own version of the tragedy.

The response of Putin and the Kremlin to these incidents brought into question exactly how far Putin's Russia has travelled from Soviet Russia where the state controlled every aspect of Russian life through a series of threats and half truths. There is a case to be made that Putin is an elected *caudillo*. He claimed publically to believe in democracy but did not indicate exactly which type of democracy held his attention. Like Chávez, Putin abided by the tenets of an established constitution to assume the presidency and, later, to step down when

his second term ended. Unlike Chávez, he did not seek doggedly to alter the constitution to maintain his position. He merely transferred his popularity and vision for Russia to another office.

Italy is neither oil rich nor a former superpower. It has endured its share of political intrigue, poor leadership and corruption. Political corruption was among the factors that brought both Chávez and Berlusconi to power. Any possibility of similarities between Chávez, Putin and Berlusconi may appear to be disquieting to the reader. However, it is because Berlusconi is not regularly perceived to be a dictator determined to undermine democracy in Italy that he was included in this thesis. Unlike Chávez and Putin, Berlusconi is a friend to the West. Indeed he is a western leader, one of those with whom Chávez and Putin occasionally experience contentious relations. Other western leaders may occasionally balk at Berlusconi's behaviour or his media gaffes but they do not view him with the animosity that they reserve for the other leaders examined here.

What is interesting is that Berlusconi's personal style, his flamboyance and his hold over Italian politics are evidence of some of the characteristics necessary for the *caudillo* label. He is also reactive like Chávez and single-minded like Putin. He has endured few of the political challenges faced by the other two leaders. Berlusconi's enemies have not been funded by the US and his reactions have not

been tested by incidents comparable to Beslan. But where Chávez and Putin appear to govern Venezuela and Russia with clear plans, Berlusconi appears to govern Italy capriciously. He has also spent a significant amount of time defending himself from corruption and conflict of interest allegations. Like Chávez and Putin, Berlusconi has a number of detractors who claim that he is unfit to lead. However, in this case, such assertions are based on his lack of political experience and his legal problems rather than on any possible desire to undo Italian democracy.

This thesis is based on the analysis of secondary, English-language sources.<sup>5</sup> There are many comprehensive biographies about each of the three world leaders detailed here. Multiple works were chosen from this category to span the period that saw each of these men in power. General history sources were included to provide necessary background information. Various political works, both general and theory specific, were used to establish definitions and provide political background. *The Statesman's Yearbook* (2009) and *Scruton's Dictionary of Political Thought* were also used to provide basic statistics and basic definitions respectively.

An effort was made to emphasize only books and academic journals relating to Chávez, Putin and Berlusconi, their governing styles and the political

climates of the related nations. This was a conscious decision which, hopefully, avoided biased sources. As is often the case when dealing with controversial, contemporary figures, each of these leaders garners a substantial amount of popular press coverage. Research for this thesis confirmed that much of this coverage is partisan and accusatory while revealing nothing tangible about either leader's ability to lead or the motivation for his decision-making.

Unfortunately, it is not only popular magazines but also a number of scholarly journal articles that cast Chávez and Putin as maniacal dictators determined to destroy or take over the world. In Putin's case there are many comparisons to Joseph Stalin. Similar sources rarely cast Berlusconi as anything other than a playboy millionaire who plays at politics while, thus far, avoiding imprisonment. This widespread media trend made the search for unbiased information difficult. Materials that were found too partisan to contribute to the construction of a sufficiently clear picture of the current political scene in either the nations or of the leaders in question were omitted.

Gregory Wilpert is a strong supporter of Chávez. His book *Changing Venezuela by Taking Power* examines Chávez's time in office, from his election in 1998 until 2007. Despite the author's potentially partisan political view, this is a detailed account of the multiple changes to the Venezuelan constitution, Chávez's

difficulties in office, the nationalization of various corporations and the enactment of the Enabling Law in January 2007. *The Battle of Venezuela* by Michael McCaughan is essentially a political history which addresses the political climate that led to Chávez's election. It gives details of the important political parties and some of their candidates. The book also examines the attempted coup against Chávez in 2002.

Chesa Boudin sat down with Chávez to ask the Venezuelan president 100 questions about Venezuela. The resulting book, *The Venezuelan Revolution: 100 Questions – 100 Answers* is an attempt to ascertain exactly who Chávez is as a leader and as a revolutionary. In most respects Boudin is successful. She provides insight into the Bolivarian ideology, the manipulation of the constitution, political foes and the future of Venezuela according to Chávez. *Presidents Without Parties* provides an overview of how men without political backgrounds attain power and the lengths that they must go through to maintain it. In this book Javier Corrales examines party building, relationships between such leaders and the military and the compromises that must be made.

Of the sources consulted for the Putin chapter, Lilia Shevtsova's *Putin's Russia* is an excellent book about many of the events and decisions of Putin's presidency, presented as a factual account of Putin's time in the president's office.

She covers everything from his appointment by Yeltsin through the sinking of the Kursk and Beslan, the acolytes and enemies, internal and external policies and Putin's decision-making processes. Her attempt at objective writing is to be commended. Peter Truscott produced an equally factual account of Putin's time in office in his book *Putin's Progress*. This book was most useful for its examination of Putin's early political involvement, his attitude toward Chechnya and his proposed reforms of everything from the judiciary to the private sector.

In his book *Putin: Russia's Choice*, Richard Sakwa delves into just how difficult it is for an individual to lead Russia. In Putin's case this means juggling his acolytes, the military, the international political community and the Russian people. Sakwa also writes about Russia's predisposition toward patrimonial leaders and the issues attached to such leadership arrangements. One of the newest books consulted for the Putin chapter is *Petrostate* by Marshall Goldman. Despite its title, this is not just a book about oil and the benefits of petrodollars. It also includes a lot of information about Putin's purge of the political, banking and private sectors. It is about how Putin maintains power.

Paul Ginsborg's book *Silvio Berlusconi: Television, Power and Patrimony* is a relatively short book which is packed with information about everything from Berlusconi's early entrepreneurial ventures through his early days in politics and

his time in office. He pays particular attention to the marketing tactics used to portray Berlusconi as the political leader of choice for the Italian people. Ginsborg presents a relatively unbiased account of Berlusconi as a political leader. Like Ginsborg, Patrick McCarthy writes a lot about Italy. His book *The Crisis of the Italian State* details post War politics in Italy. For this thesis it was particularly useful for its coverage of corruption, clientelism and the political scandals of the early 1990s. The biographical sketches at the beginning of this book were invaluable.

Michael Shin and John Agnew explore in detail elections and voting patterns since 1994 in their book *Berlusconi's Italy: Mapping Contemporary Italian Politics*. They examine Berlusconi's geographic popularity and both the positive and negative aspects of Berlusconi's political style. *The Sack of Rome* by Alexander Stille is the most biased book used for the chapter on Berlusconi. The title alone indicates the author's view of Italy's prime minister. However, the book does include useful facts and supplementary information. Several of the authors consulted for this chapter share Stille's disdain for Berlusconi and his methods of governing.

In addition to the Introduction, the thesis is organized in three chapters with a Conclusion. The first chapter examines Hugo Chávez's leadership style,

the nature of Venezuelan democracy and Venezuela's political culture. This chapter will set the pattern for comparison for the leaders in each of the subsequent chapters. Chapter Two will examine leadership style with reference to Vladimir Putin's presidency and politics, and culture in Russia. In Chapter Three this line of analysis will be applied to Silvio Berlusconi's leadership and Italy. While there is little doubt that Italy is a liberal democracy, as defined by western standards, it is interesting to speculate about the extent to which Prime Minister Berlusconi is an elected *caudillo* and how his appetite for power may be tempered. The Conclusion summarizes the findings of the preceding chapters and offers possible explanations regarding potential underlying factors that allowed, and still allow, political leaders such as Chávez, Putin and Berlusconi to govern as they do.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Here I use the masculine pronoun because charismatic leaders are rarely, if ever, female.

<sup>2</sup> The first Chechen conflict began in 1994 well before Putin became president (Riasanovsky 2005, 617).

<sup>3</sup> The Kursk was lost with all hands in the Barents Sea in August 2000.

<sup>4</sup> In October 2002 a group of Chechen fighters took approximately eight hundred theatre goers hostage at this Moscow theatre (Shevtsova 2005, 253). Later, in August 2004, a multi-ethnic terrorist group took more than one thousand students, staff and parents hostage in a school in North Ossetia (Shevtsova 2005, 388).

<sup>5</sup> At this juncture it should be noted that common forms of spelling were used for Russian names, political parties, government agencies, etc. rather than the academic Library of Congress style of transliteration.

## Chapter One

### Hugo Chávez

Hugo Chávez Frías first appeared on Venezuela's political scene as a *golpista*.<sup>1</sup> It was 1992 and Chávez was just one on a long list of military officers who sought to overthrow the elected leader of a Latin American country. What distinguishes Chávez from the others on that list is that he went on to be elected President of Venezuela in 1998 in accordance with the constitution of the day. The Chávez of 1998 was a man in the right place at the right time. His campaign appealed to millions of Venezuelans who were tired of having their voices and needs ignored. In the decade since his election, Chávez has become a politician and set Venezuela on a decidedly different democratic path.

Along the way Chávez has garnered many opponents. They come from other political parties, the military, the private sector, trade unions and the Church. He has also made no secret of his dislike for the United States (US). Recently, along with President Evo Morales of Bolivia, the Chávez government expelled the US Ambassador to Venezuela and recalled their own ambassador over allegations of US meddling in the politics of the region. As the US has made a hobby of insinuating itself into the politics of the region in the past, Chávez's accusations may not be without merit.<sup>2</sup> It was rumoured that, when Chávez's

opponents sought to plan an overthrow in 2002, a small group of individuals "made a pilgrimage" to Washington, DC for the purpose of "gauging White House support" for a plan to oust the Venezuelan president (McCaughan 2004, 85). There is no firm indication that White House officials agreed to provide support to this group. At the time the White House was preoccupied with the *war on terror*.

Chávez also maintains his share of friends. He continues to enjoy the support of a majority of Venezuelans. He maintains close ties with the leaders of Bolivia, Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador and Nicaragua among others. To the dismay of the western world he has also visited President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Iran and, as recently as November 2008, Venezuela hosted a portion of the Russian navy for exercises off the coast while Chávez played host to Russian President Dmitrii Medvedev.<sup>3</sup> Like many political leaders Chávez has also promoted and appointed friends and supporters to influential positions within the military, the government and the judiciary. This insulates and protects Chávez from opposition while helping him further the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela. His friendships with other Latin American leaders bolsters Chávez's image in the region, fosters anti-Americanism and promotes economic ties. His colourful

relations abroad give Chávez an international political platform while allowing him to voice his disdain for the US among likeminded world leaders.

If Chávez is not, as some observers claim, an ego maniacal dictator determined to destroy Venezuelan democracy, who is he? Is he an elected *caudillo* as defined in the Introduction of this thesis? Or, does he represent some other political manifestation? And, does Venezuela maintain some sort of democracy or has it already descended into dictatorship? The questions of electoral *caudillismo* and democracy are those that this chapter will seek to address.

Chávez emerged into politics – a man with no party. He gained significant notoriety due to his involvement in the first of two failed military coups in 1992. From his prison cell Chávez urged eligible voters to abstain from voting in the December 1993 election. Approximately 40 percent of the voting public obliged and stayed at home (McCaughan 2004, 43). As part of a series of election promises made by the new president, the original 1992 coup leaders were freed.<sup>4</sup> While the new government proved to be as inept as its predecessors and with economic crisis ever present, Chávez quietly planned his political future. Along with a growing number of supporters Chávez began to organize the basis for his first legitimate presidential campaign. Because he had no previous political party affiliation, Chávez was forced to create a party. The MVR (*Movimiento Quinta*

*República*) was born from the remains of MRB (*Movimiento Revolucionario Bolivariano*) 200.<sup>5</sup>

Since his election in 1998, Chávez has won two presidential elections in 2000 and 2006. The former was a type of re-election after the constitutional reform of the previous year.<sup>6</sup> In 1998 he won with 56.2 percent of the vote and in 2006 he won by 62.9 percent. These are both substantial victories. In addition to the constitutional referendum of 1999, there have been three other significant referenda. The first was a Recall Referendum in response to the 2002 coup attempt and the subsequent national oil strike.<sup>7</sup> The 2004 referendum queried whether Chávez should remain in power to serve out his term in office. Again Chávez was victorious. The elections were monitored by various international observers. Few irregularities were found (Kyriakou 2006, 1). The Recall Referendum was closely watched by observers from both the Carter Center and from the Organization of American States (OAS). These groups found no issue(s) with endorsing the results (Gott 2005, 263).

The first referendum concerning a constitutional amendment to abolish presidential term limits was held in December 2007. Chávez's aspirations of governing for life were quashed by a margin of 51 percent to 49 percent against. A second referendum on this same issue was held in February 2009. This

referendum was held while Chávez's popularity remained high and before oil prices began to plummet. At this point a decrease in oil revenues had yet to compromise the country's wealth or the programs that Chávez enacted to help Venezuelans. Chávez emerged victorious with approximately 54.85 percent of voters siding with the president.<sup>8</sup>

When he was elected in 1998 Chávez vowed to represent the poor, dissolve the National Congress, convene a Constituent Assembly, eradicate corruption and redistribute the nation's wealth in a more equitable fashion (Tarver and Frederick 2005, 151). Within a year the government unveiled the Bolivarian Constitution<sup>9</sup> by which Chávez would govern. Some experts contend that this version of the constitution is socialist, in line with Chávez's intent to pursue socialism rather than neo-liberalism as his style of government (Wilpert 2007, 3).<sup>10</sup> Chávez himself has spoken out against the neo-liberal style of government and he has spoken often in favour of socialism but this initial constitutional change was designed to allow the new president an opportunity to govern as he saw fit.

The 1999 constitution brought sweeping changes which further centralized the government and concentrated more power in the hands of the president. Under the new constitution the president is permitted to hold office for six years rather than five and to sit for two consecutive terms. In addition, the power of

both the government and the military were enhanced and the structure of government was made unicameral as the senate was abolished in favour of a National Assembly (Turner 2005, 1998). The president was also given the power to veto congressional bills while the congress was in turn empowered to override presidential vetoes. In November the National Assembly approved the *Ley Habilitante* or the "Enabling Law" which allowed Chávez to legislate by decree on matters relating to the economy, social issues and issues related to public administration for one year (*Timeline: Venezuela*, 28 November 2006).<sup>11</sup> Such a law undermines the natural checks and balances of government and effectively negates the role of the National Assembly. It also emphasizes the loyalty of the coalition to the leader and the discipline necessary to allow him to govern at will.

Like many of his predecessors throughout the region, Chávez sought to placate the military in an attempt to render them less problematic. During his first years in office Chávez appointed a number of high ranking military officials to lead important government ministries including posts in justice and defense. The same sort of individuals took up high level positions in government controlled industries (Corrales 2002, 300). Plan Bolívar 2000 gave the military a direct role in developing Venezuela.<sup>12</sup> The plan put members of the armed forces to work building houses and schools, distributing food and providing other public

services (Ottaway 2003, 85). There were complaints from the opposition parties and other opponents of the president that the military were too deeply involved in previously civilian undertakings.

In 2004 Chávez created an "army" of urban reservists to complement the regular armed forces (Corrales 2006, 34). As the president planned to expand this group to two million members, theorists claim that this is a personal army to ensure that Chávez maintains power indefinitely. During the same period Chávez gained control of the National Electoral Council (NEC) giving him "command" of the agency which governs elections in Venezuela (Corrales 2006, 34). Laws were also revised to permit state supervision of the media content and facilitate the imprisonment of "any citizen showing disrespect for government officials" (Corrales, 2006, 34). In addition to these revisions, the government admitted that citizens who signed the petition demanding the 2004 Recall Referendum could be observed for loyalty or opposition to the government. The state's ability to supervise media content through new communications laws and the president's control of *Petróleos de Venezuela, SA* (PDVSA) through his many personal appointments were harbingers of the nationalisations that followed in the ensuing years.

With his term in office assured by the Recall Referendum Chávez continued to accumulate power. His opponents were, at least temporarily, held at bay by Chávez's popularity, by his ability to fund numerous social programs with increasing petrodollars and the simple fact that individuals who were loyal to the president held virtually every important office, public or private, in the country. In the latter half of 2005 he initiated a program of land expropriation. Huge tracts of private land were taken over by the state with the assistance of local governors and the National Guard (Corrales 2006, 37). Ostensibly this land was for redistribution to Venezuela's poor so that they may become self sufficient. However, observers claim that the land was for redistribution to Chávez loyalists.

Chávez was even further emboldened by his 2006 re-election. Buoyed by a significant election majority and increasing oil revenues Chávez pushed forward with an ambitious political agenda. Within two weeks of his re-election he announced the creation of the "most democratic party in Venezuela", the *Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela* (PSUV), which was designed to unify all of his supporters (Wilpert 2007, 219).<sup>13</sup> Chávez expected, but did not order, that all members of the MVR and his other coalition party members would leave their own organizations and join his newly formed party. He allowed nine months for supporters to make their decisions. Those who refused to join the PSUV or left the

coalition were to be treated as “cowards and counterrevolutionaries” (Wilpert 2007, 220).

At the end of January 2007 Chávez requested that the National Assembly grant him the ability to rule by decree for a period of eighteen months ending in July 2008. There was no issue with the granting of this second *Ley Habilitante* as the National Assembly was stacked with Chávez supporters obliged to furnish the president with the power that he desired.<sup>14</sup> The ability to rule by decree allowed Chávez to move forward with his bold post-election plans. The most ambitious plan was to nationalize substantial portions of the petroleum, energy and telecommunications sectors. As the state already enjoyed administrative control of PDVSA, the nationalization legislation merely finalized the existing arrangement.<sup>15</sup> After the company was nationalized, PDVSA purchased more than eight per cent of *Electricidad de Caracas*, one of the largest suppliers of electricity. The nationalization wave included all of the other regional electricity companies (Wilpert 2007, 222).

Nationalization in the telecommunications sector mainly affected *Compañía Anónima Nacional de Teléfonos de Venezuela* (CANTV) which was owned in part by the US based Verizon (Wilpert 2007, 221). Control of CANTV alone gave the state a significant inroad in the industry. In the Spring 2008 the state went on to

nationalize CEMEX an international cement manufacturing company and SIDOR a steel company with investors in Europe and South America. The last among the changes set out by Chávez's post election plan occurred when the state declined to renew the broadcast license of *Radio Caracas Televisión (RCTV)*.<sup>36</sup> In the past RCTV attacked Chávez for perceived violations of political and civil rights (Faria 2008, 531). The company was also considered to be complicit in the 2002 oil strike. This post election plan was altered in November 2008 when, in response to falling oil prices and international economic turmoil, the government sought to nationalize gold mining interests.

At this juncture one may question the role, if any, of the opposition in governing Venezuela. Since Chávez's initial election victory the political opposition has struggled to find its voice. Generally, the parties make their opposition known through the media but they are powerless to stop the president (Malinarich 2006). The government and the official opposition do not communicate directly and this behaviour severely hampers any ability to keep the government in check. In 2005 the opposition parties boycotted the National Assembly elections thus providing Chávez with an even greater majority while depriving the opposition of a stage for its own policies. Fortunately, for the 2006

presidential elections opposition parties did field candidates who campaigned, voiced their concerns and set out specific platforms.

Thus far this chapter has detailed Hugo Chávez's time in office in an attempt to discover the sort of leader that Venezuelans have permitted to retain office for the past decade. Journalistic and scholarly opinion casts him as an authoritarian dictator bent on the destruction of Venezuelan democracy. From the beginning of his first electoral campaign Chávez has marketed himself as the successor of Simon Bolivar (McCaughan 2004, 8). As Bolivar aspired to free Latin America from the yoke of Spain, Chávez aims to free Venezuela from its past. This means replacing the old political system with something new and including more than the political elites in the politics of the country. Bolivar advocated for "liberty and equality" with a strong government designed around a lifetime president (Lynch 2006, 284). Certainly, in eighteenth century Latin America, Bolivar did not intend for a president to stand for a modern democratic election.

Chávez depends on his personal charisma to endear himself to the population. He deliberately set out to cast himself as a larger than life character who fixes the problems of Venezuelan society. Observers even claim that he has cast himself as a modern day Robin Hood with a touch of "anti-American, anti-neoliberalist rhetoric" (Corrales 2006, 33). From the outset of the Chávez era

voters have been less interested in “voting for representatives – people want Chávez and power to *el pueblo*” (Gunson 2006, 60). The president can maintain this phenomenon as long as he continues to encourage a grassroots-style revolution, give individuals an increased say in their communities, addresses issues concerning the marginalized sections of the population and as long as he has the funding for new and continuing social programs that address poverty and inequality. Of course, the latter is almost entirely dependent on the fickle prices of a non-renewable resource – oil.

It cannot be denied that Chávez “won power at the ballot box” and that this makes him difficult to oppose in democratic terms (Corrales 2006, 33). His political activities have been within the dictates of the constitution, but there are those that would contend that this was barely the case. It cannot be denied that Chávez has concentrated power largely in his own hands, harassed and punished his opponents and members of the media, persecuted civic organizations and increased state control of the economy (Corrales 2006, 33). On the surface this does appear to be an authoritarian style of government. However, his opponents are alive and are still able to pursue means of ousting Chávez from power. The past decade has shown that these individuals are not beyond operating outside the law to achieve their goal. Indeed the first coup in 2002 sought to depose a

democratically elected president and replace him with a puppet representative of the old elites. Contrary to authoritarian stereotypes there are no camps or mass executions, no *desaparecidos* and civil society does exist (Corrales 2006, 34).<sup>17</sup>

Chávez's detractors neglect the fact that Venezuelan politics was a tidy democracy only because it was a case of *democracia pactada* or pacted politics.<sup>18</sup> They also fail to note that this unique form of democracy is rarely, if ever, successful. There are those who claim that *democracia pactada* is a weak, rigid form of democracy which is destined to collapse into political disarray because it is incapable of keeping pace with ever changing public demand. Thus, for four decades Venezuelan politics appeared to be peaceful and politically trouble-free while, all along it was led by a small group of Venezuelan political elites who governed by compromise and ignored the needs of the marginalized until the economy was nearly destroyed.<sup>19</sup> Suddenly Venezuelan democracy appears slightly less democratic. There was no single dictator and regular elections occurred but power was retained in the hands of the elites.<sup>20</sup>

The cascading economic crises that began in 1980s, the staggering international debt, multiple attempts at structural adjustment, the drastic decrease in the standard of living of the majority of Venezuelans and ongoing accusations of political corruption were the obvious reasons for Venezuelans to demand

change in the way that their nation was governed. As soon as he announced that his first priority was to revamp the political system and began to rail to the public about the evils of neo-liberalism, which was perceived to have caused many of Venezuela's economic woes, Chávez virtually assured his election and continued time in office. After all it was the neo-liberalist policies of the previous administrations that were perceived to have caused the economic catastrophe.

The failure of structure and the success of agency allowed Chávez attain political power and to retain it. Certainly, by western standards, Venezuela possessed all of the necessary structures for a successful democracy. There were well established government institutions and agencies, longstanding political parties, a stable constitution, and a functioning legal system. However, many of these structures were badly compromised or rendered useless by the *democracia pactada*. Class dissatisfaction and inequality and the rise of civil society in the 1990s left Venezuela ripe for Chávez's Bolivarian Revolution.

Weak or non-existent structures provide an opportunity for agency to thrive. Chávez would be the agent. It should not be forgotten that he enjoyed notoriety as a *golpista* and managed to sway an election while still in prison. The *democracia pactada* left Venezuelan government unable and unwilling to respond to the needs and demands of average citizens. They required a leader with no

loyalty or ties to existing political parties or government around which they could rally. Chávez was the individual with the necessary qualifications when the time came to revolutionize Venezuelan politics. His popularity continues to allow him to consolidate power and to establish a government and a country in accordance with his own aims.

Two overarching questions remain: is Hugo Chávez an elected *caudillo* and is Venezuela a delegative democracy? The basic answer to the first question is “yes” Chávez is an elected *caudillo*. He does not, however, embody all of the negative characteristics of elected *caudillismo* that Close intended when he defined this concept in terms of Nicaragua’s Arnoldo Aléman. Despite claims by Chávez’s detractors that he is *evil incarnate* with an agenda to set Venezuela up as a dictatorship, he is not an elected *caudillo* in the Aléman-sense of the term. Chávez claims to be genuinely interested in building a stronger Venezuela within a democratic framework. Voters freely admit to electing Chávez – the man, to the presidency in 1998.

Venezuela, like most of Latin America, has a strong history of personalistic leaders. Chávez governs Venezuela in accordance with his personal beliefs and ambitions in the spirit of Bolívar. His opponents contend that Bolívar’s leadership style was “best suited to military dictators”, but even Chávez found himself

without full military support during the brief 2002 coup (Lynch 2006, 304). He has left his personal military involvement behind while removing those he trusts from the armed forces and placing them in alternate civilian positions. Even this is nothing more than any other leader would do – place his loyal supporters in positions of power.

The question of whether Venezuela is a delegative democracy is a more complicated one. When O'Donnell set the definition of delegative democracy he indicated that this form of democracy was a step on the path to successful liberal democracy. It cannot be denied that Venezuela already has a successful democracy despite the pact and the many crises of the past twenty years. However, if one reads O'Donnell's definition closely it states that delegative democracy is an instance where voters elect a president "... to govern as he (or she) thinks best ..." (O'Donnell 1994, 56). This is what Venezuelans have done by electing Chávez. They have chosen a president to govern in accordance with his own beliefs and aspirations for the nation. In this way, in the case of Venezuela, perhaps delegative democracy is not a step on the democratic path but rather a set of circumstances which causes an electorate to choose a personalistic leader because they believe that he alone is the individual best suited to govern the

nation. Right now in Venezuela, delegative democracy is a choice within democracy and not a step along the way to democracy.

## NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> Latin American term – *golpe* refers to coup d'état. Thus, *golpista* is a coup participant.
- <sup>2</sup> The US has been interfering in Latin American politics since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
- <sup>3</sup> Venezuela will purchase military armaments and planes from the Russians.
- <sup>4</sup> Rafael Caldera was elected president with just 30% of the eligible vote (McCaughan 2004, 43).
- <sup>5</sup> Chávez was recruited into anti-government activities in 1980 and by 1992 he had established a "secret cell" within the military called MRB 200 (McCaughan 2004, 31).
- <sup>6</sup> Chávez was initially elected in accordance with the 1961 constitution.
- <sup>7</sup> In December 2002 Chávez's opponents called for an "economic coup" designed to cripple Venezuela's oil industry and force Chávez from office (Gott 2005, 249). The military were sent to crush the strike in January 2003. Nearly 20,000 oil industry workers were fired.
- <sup>8</sup> Slightly more than 70 percent of eligible participants voted.
- <sup>9</sup> The 1999 constitution was fashioned after that of France's Fifth Republic (Turner 2008, 1495).
- <sup>10</sup> According to Marxist theory socialism is the "transitional stage between capitalism and communism". In modern times this definition is more difficult as it concerns "the belief in equality, the elimination of traditional systems of control and the notion of the state as an administrative device" (Scruton 2007, 646-647).
- <sup>11</sup> By the time this provision expired forty-nine laws had been passed.
- <sup>12</sup> Approximately 29,000 troops were involved with Plan Bolívar 2000 (Phillip 2003, 134).
- <sup>13</sup> The *Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela* translates as the Unified Socialist Party of Venezuela.
- <sup>14</sup> There is a failsafe built into the Enabling Law. According to the 1999 constitution, if "ten percent of registered voters petition to have a law put to a vote then the vote must occur" (Wilpert 2007, 227).
- <sup>15</sup> PDVSA is the fifth largest petroleum exporter.
- <sup>16</sup> It should be noted that the state does reserve the right to license media outlets at its discretion.
- <sup>17</sup> Literally this means the disappeared.
- <sup>18</sup> The Pact of Punto Fijo insured that from 1958 to 1989 Venezuelan politics was stable and fairly quiet with AD and COPEI exchanging power regularly until 1993.
- <sup>19</sup> According to Terry Karl "pacts are negotiated compromise which establish the rules for future governance" (Karl, 1986, 197). With this in mind pacts are extremely costly to maintain as the government is forced to make many compromises in order to function. The result is a middle-of-the-road style of governance where no sector of the government is entirely satisfied.
- <sup>20</sup> Michael Coppedge would likely define pre-Chávez Venezuelan politics as a "partyarchy". This is "a democracy in which political parties monopolize the formal political process and politicize society along party lines" (Coppedge 1994, 18).

## Chapter Two

### Vladimir Putin

Unlike Venezuela, Russia has never been touted as the poster child for democracy in any region. Indeed, Russia has fewer than twenty years of democratic tradition. In that time there have been three presidents and numerous prime ministers. Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin has held both posts. He was handpicked to assume the presidency by an ailing President Boris Yeltsin less than six months after taking over the prime minister's office.<sup>1</sup> A decade later observers contend that Russia is distinctly less democratic under the guidance of the former president and current Prime Minister Putin than it had been since the end of communist rule. Such observers point to Putin as the maestro of a resurgence in authoritarian-style government in Russia.

Of the three leaders examined in this thesis, Vladimir Putin is the only one who does not currently hold the top position of power in his country. In accordance with the Russian constitution, Putin prepared to leave the president's office at the 2008 elections after serving for two consecutive terms. He quickly announced his candidacy for the prime minister's post. As expected, his handpicked successor, Dmitrii Anatolevich Medvedev, was promptly elected president.<sup>2</sup> Rumblings followed this skilfully crafted change in power that suggest

that Putin, in his quest to retain his hard won power over Russia, quietly transferred a block of presidential powers to the prime minister's office.

There are two sets of questions that this chapter will not discuss. One is the potential power struggle between Putin and Medvedev. The second is a series of events including the conflict in Chechnya, the Kursk, the Dubrovka Theatre, Beslan or Russia's deteriorating relations with the West. Events such as these could have befallen any Russian president and, for that matter, they could have happened to any one of a number of world leaders. The emphasis here is on the type of president that Putin was and the type of democracy that this sort of leadership fashioned in Russia.

According to the Russian public, Putin was a remarkably popular president. Data indicates that, during his time in office, his approval rating never dipped below 65 percent and usually ranged between 70 and 80 percent (Goldman 2008, 201). Putin owed at least a portion of this rampant popularity to the fact that he followed Boris Yeltsin into office. During Yeltsin's tenure Russians endured eight years of an infirm, erratic and often drunken president. When Putin took office as a young, sober and healthy individual, with a "business-like" manner, he was an immediate improvement (Lucas 2008, 8). Putin's nationalism and his intense desire to return Russia to her superpower status addressed the

embarrassment of many Russians over just how far the country had fallen. This was an embarrassment that Putin very likely shared with his fellow Russians.

Although average Russians seemed to support Putin, he had many detractors. His main opponents were concentrated in the media, the oligarchy and the private sector.<sup>3</sup> His dealings with internal opponents will be addressed later in this chapter. His relationships with the United States (US), Europe and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) members were both positive and negative. Relations between Russia and the US remained tainted by the cold war and, despite Russia's post-Soviet evolution, an air of suspicion remained regardless of Putin's generally cordial relations with former President George W. Bush. His support of the US war on terror furnished Putin with a plausible reason to direct his military campaign in Chechnya as he claimed to be fighting terrorism because Chechen Islamic groups were providing assistance to various rebel groups (Service 2003, 544).

Putin's relationship with NATO was also both genial and contentious. In the early days of his presidency Putin was rumoured to have considered allowing Russia to join NATO (Black 2004, 32). Albeit short-lived, this notion prompted Putin to spend much of the rest of his time in office engaged in railing against some NATO action or policy. An example of this particularly contentious issue

was Georgia's intention to join NATO (Traub 2008, 4).<sup>4</sup> Over time, Putin suspended arms control agreements, dispatched military planes into NATO airspace, and threatened to aim missiles at Europe (Lucas 2008, 10).

As Putin worked to reclaim Russia's place on the international stage Western accounts of his presidency became increasingly negative. He became an enemy of democracy. It is this image which inspired Putin's portrayal as a typical authoritarian leader who paid little more than lip service to the notion of democracy. Yet, as suggested by Stuermer, he might also be viewed simply as a nationalist leader who manipulated individuals and government in order to restore Russia to its former glory (Stuermer 2008, 17). Perhaps, as Shevtsova suggests, he was a bureaucratic authoritarian (Shevtsova 2005, 323).<sup>5</sup> Or, perhaps, he too was an elected *caudillo* as defined by Close. One of the purposes of this thesis is to generalize Latin American theory with reference to a different geographical and political context, such as Putin's Russia. As was the case with Venezuela, the question regarding what sort of democracy, if any, existed in Russia during Putin's tenure as president and whether that form of democracy was actually delegative democracy must also be addressed.

Like Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, Putin emerged onto Russia's national political scene as a man with no party who had never been elected to public

office. Though, unlike Chávez he was not the leader of a failed coup but rather a bureaucrat who reached the rank of lieutenant colonel with the Committee of State Security (KGB).<sup>6</sup> His political involvement began when he joined the administrative staff of Mayor Anatoly Sobchak in Leningrad while still employed by the KGB.<sup>7</sup> During this time he contradictorily claimed to have resigned his post with the KGB and to have the agency's blessing on his new post as chairman of St. Petersburg's Foreign Relations Committee (Truscott 2004, 68). As it was extremely unlikely that anyone was actually allowed to resign from the KGB, it is more likely that the country and the agency were in such a state of disarray that Putin's career change was relatively unimportant.

Putin was appointed first deputy mayor under Sobchak in 1994 and ran Sobchak's unsuccessful re-election campaign in 1996. After the campaign he found himself unemployed. Later that same year Putin went to Moscow where he was offered a position in the Legal Department of the president's General Affairs Office. It is generally accepted among observers that Vladimir Yakovlev, the new Governor of St. Petersburg and close friend of the Yeltsin family, wanted Putin out of his city and lobbied his many political friends to find Putin a job (Truscott 2004, 81).<sup>8</sup> Two years later, in 1998, Putin came to the attention of members of Yeltsin's administrative staff. He first became Deputy Head of Management in the

president's administration and in July 1998 was appointed Head of the Federal Security Service (FSB).<sup>9</sup>

Yeltsin was impressed with Putin's "ability to get the job done" and by his loyalty (Riasanovsky 2005, 626). The latter would prove vital to Yeltsin if he and his family members were to obtain immunity from prosecution under a new administration. In August 1999 Putin was appointed prime minister and the Yeltsin camp began regularly to poll Russians on his popularity (Truscott 2004, 111).<sup>10</sup> Clearly the plan for Putin's future was set. It was rumoured that Yeltsin first discussed the handover of power with Putin as late as mid-December 1999 with the final agreement settled on 29 December (Truscott 2004, 119). Just two days later, on New Year's Eve, Putin was appointed Russia's second president.<sup>11</sup> As expected, Putin promptly issued his first decree granting Yeltsin immunity from any wrongdoing during his time in office and "absolving" all aides of any wrongdoing as they were under Yeltsin's direction (Shevtsova 2005, 69).<sup>12</sup> The former president's gamble on Putin's loyalty proved fruitful.

According to the 1993 constitution, Putin had ninety days from his appointment to solidify a political base and stand in a presidential election. His other options entailed surrendering the post by not running or holding onto power by usurping the constitution. He did neither. Preparations for a March

election began in earnest. Putin initially faced ten candidates in the 2000 presidential election but by March all but a few had dropped out. Among those remaining were Vladimir Zhirinovsky (Liberal Democratic Party), Gennady Zyuganov (Communist Party) and Grigory Yavlinsky (Yabloko Party).<sup>13</sup> None of these men were political neophytes and, consequently, each brought his own political baggage to the election. By election time Putin's popularity had reached a very high level. His stance on the Second Chechen War made him "appear to be a strong, decisive leader" (Shevtsova 2005, 70).

Putin cultivated the support of the Unity Party, which he supported in the December 1999 elections, winning the presidency with 53 percent of the vote (Turner 2008, 1040).<sup>14</sup> His closest opponent, Zyuganov, received approximately 29 percent of the vote. After the uncertainty of Yeltsin's time in office Russians were apparently ready for a change. Of course, having been appointed by Yeltsin gave Putin the competitive advantage. As acting president he had ready access to the instruments necessary to ensure his election. Moreover, he did not have to scramble for financial backing to support his campaign. This meant that he owed the private sector nothing. And, he did not even need to create a party (Service 2003, 543).

The Duma elections in December 2003 were a harbinger of things to come. It was generally perceived that if United Russia failed to win, then Putin's position as a presidential candidate would be weakened (Shevtsova 2005, 286). The incumbent had no reason for concern as United Russia won the Duma elections with slightly more than 37 percent of the vote over the Communist Party with approximately 12 percent (Shevtsova 2005, 288). Voter turnout was 55 percent. Beyond alluding to the need to fight corruption and free Russia from the oligarchs, Putin did not campaign actively (Riasanovsky 2005, 629).<sup>15</sup> His five opponents did their best to run election campaigns but found themselves largely shut out from the media with their rallies cancelled or raided. With just more than 64 percent voter turnout Putin prevailed with 71 percent of the vote over Nikolay Kharitonov's nearly 14 percent (Shevtsova 2005, 302). Both the Duma and presidential elections were watched by official and unofficial observers. It was concluded that, overall, the elections were free but badly flawed.

Russia is the most democratically challenged nation of the three countries presented in this thesis. Putin, when compared to Chávez and Silvio Berlusconi, at least possessed policy and government experience from his time with the secret service and in both the Sobchak and the Yeltsin administrations. With his obligation to Yeltsin successfully discharged and an election victory in hand Putin

moved on to the business of revitalizing Russia. Professionally he knew that the key to succeeding at this task was a strong state (Truscott 2004, 124). He quickly set about to restructure both the legislative regions and the Federation Council. Both of these objectives were strategically designed to address Putin's election promise to decrease corruption. What resulted was the centralization of power and an increased control over local governments.

In an effort to address what Putin perceived as "competition for power between the centre and the state" and to "reassert constitutional authority" Russia's eighty-nine legislative regions were restructured (Sakwa 2008, 193-194). The result was seven larger administrative districts. Where federal leaders were elected posts, each new district was represented by an individual appointed by and loyal to Putin. Most appointees had either military or security backgrounds (Turner 2008, 1040).<sup>16</sup> Individuals loyal to the president would follow his directives. The 1999 Duma elections insured that Putin had the full support of the lower house of the Russian Federal Assembly. In order to assure similar support from the upper house, the Federation Council, elected members were replaced with appointees from the regional governors as approved by the Kremlin (Felshtinsky and Pribylovsky 2008, 173). Thus, the Federation Council lost its independence entirely.

While Putin enjoyed substantial support in the Duma, he did not have a majority until April 2001. That is when the Unity Party merged with the Fatherland bloc. The latter was controlled by former Yeltsin Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov and Moscow Mayor Yury Luzhkov. The merger was, of course, orchestrated by the Kremlin to provide Putin with greater control in the Duma (Shevtsova 2005, 181). It succeeded because of Putin's extreme popularity and the fact that it was already clear to the more astute Russian politicians that it was unwise to go against the president when such an offer was made. The resulting party, United Russia, gave Putin 132 seats of the 226 seat simple majority (Turner 2008, 1041). A corresponding party was also formed in the Federation Council.

Aside from providing Putin with control of the Duma, the party merger effectively reduced the number of opposition parties, limiting the number of politicians positioned to speak out against the president or against Kremlin policies. Fewer parties translated into fewer "vehicles for personal ego building and petty feuds" as Putin once described political parties (Goldman 2008, 171). A number of the oligarchs that Putin would eventually target provided substantial financial backing to opposition parties.

Among the multitude of changes undertaken in 2001 was a reinvigorated attempt to reform the judicial system. Yeltsin's attempts at reform in 1990s failed and Putin intended to be successful. He envisioned a legal system that was more effective and "just" while being responsive to the aims of the president (Truscott 2004, 208). An independent judiciary was not an option. Corruption was considered rampant in the legal system with the prosecutor's office being "among the most flawed" (Lucas 2008, 73). This office had the right to investigate and imprison whomever it chose without credible evidence or, for that matter, any evidence at all. Putin's reforms included: increased status, compensation and accountability for judges, more courts, more funding for the court system, the creation of Justices of the Peace, the development of a trial by jury system and set the time for pre-trial detention to one year (Truscott 2004, 208). The Constitutional Court was also granted the power to ensure that court decisions were upheld. Finally, in an attempt to balance the power of the prosecutor's office, defence lawyers were granted more rights during trials.

Next Putin turned his attention to the army. Strengthening the Russian military was one part of restoring Russia's might. Putin inherited a military in desperate need of attention and reform. Events in Chechnya were barely under control (Lucas 2008, 5). There were numerous reports of the abuse of recruits at

the hands of their military superiors, lack of food and basic supplies, lack of equipment, high desertion rates and far above average suicide rates. The equipment was decrepit and the training lacklustre. According to Anna Politkovskaya the army was "a prison where no one gets in unless someone wants them and once in they are slaves forever" (Politkovskaya 2004, 1). In the state that it was, the military also provided individuals with fertile ground on which to take advantage of their rank and parlay their military service into a quick method of advancement into the political elite. This was the case during the Chechen conflict.

Throughout the second conflict in Chechnya the military was given significant latitude (Sakwa 2008, 76). Putin expected success. Hence, the government paid more attention to the military. Between 2000 and 2006 Russia increased military spending by 3.5 percent or approximately USD\$30 billion (Sakwa 2008, 77).<sup>17</sup> New policies related to abolishing conscription, addressing abuse and creating a more professional organization were developed as part of military reform. As part of this design, in 2006, Putin established six objectives for the military to achieve over the next decade. The new objectives included: Russian forces should study competing forces in order to develop superior responses; living conditions for officers and soldiers were to be improved and one half of the

military budget would be devoted to increased training, better equipment and "technical advancement" (Stuermer 2008, 103). Notably, no plan was devised to ensure that these objectives were met.

No leader runs a country entirely alone and Putin was no exception. As a rule leaders surround themselves with individuals that they feel that they can trust. However, Putin inherited his first cabinet and it took some time to replace its members with his own trusted cadre. Slowly and steadily the *siloviki* assumed top posts in the government, related state agencies and the military.<sup>38</sup> Some of them also made their way into the upper echelons of industry and the media.

According to Putin, industries that were controlled by the oligarchy should function in Russia's national interest and not service the personal greed of their owners. Such industries, mostly related to the energy sector, were to be reclaimed and reorganized ostensibly to ensure their competitiveness with their western counterparts (Lucas 2008, 97). This was part of the president's bid to reclaim some of Russia's economic influence. By 2008 state owned companies were staffed by "likeminded individuals" who would obey Putin's directives (Goldman 2008, 99).

In July 2000 Putin reportedly gathered approximately two dozen of Russia's leading oligarchs at the Kremlin. The attendees were informed that if they did not involve themselves in the politics of the nation then the state would

not interfere in their business dealings (Goldman 2008, 102). By that time Viktor Chernomyrdin, the Chairman of Gazprom and Vladimir Gusinsky, the head of Media-Most had already been removed from their posts. Gusinsky was jailed for his network's criticism of the government's handling of the Chechen conflict and various "undemocratic practices" (Riasanovsky 2005, 629). Boris Berezovsky and Mikhail Khodorkovsky ignored the advice. Berezovsky had been an ally of both Yeltsin and Putin. He became an outspoken critic of Putin and attempted to organize his own political party while funding various human rights groups (Riasanovsky 2005, 629). Before the end of that year, after threat of imprisonment, Berezovsky surrendered control of his oil company, Sibneft, and fled to England.<sup>19</sup> Khodorkovsky began an 8 year prison sentence in 2005.

In 2001 Rem Vyakhirev was removed as Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Gazprom. The following year Viktor Gerashchenko was removed from his post as chairman of the Russian Central Bank. The removal of Chernomyrdin, Vyakhirev and Gerashchenko were touted as an attempt to "halt banditry" and stop what Putin perceived as gross mismanagement and "pillaging" of the state (Goldman 2008, 104). Gusinsky, Berezovsky and Khodorkovsky either pilloried Putin in the media, supported his opponents financially or attempted to start their own political parties (or some combination of these offences). Their harassment at the

hands of Putin could be interpreted as revenge for what the president perceived as a lack of respect towards him or as a desire to eliminate opponents.

The persecution and prosecution of Khodorkovsky was, at least in part, tied to his company – Yukos.<sup>20</sup> After Khodorkovsky failed to heed the president's warning in 2000 Yukos became financially stronger and its owner became bolder. When Khodorkovsky negotiated an agreement with China that would establish a pipeline between the two nations Putin accused him of "negotiating foreign policy" which was, of course, exclusively the state's jurisdiction (Goldman 2008, 111). This misstep, interpreted within the purview of Putin's quest to garner control of the energy sector, led to Khodorkovsky's arrest in 2003. The charges against him included: tax evasion, grand theft, fraud, forgery, embezzlement and extortion. The company was found to owe approximately USD\$33 billion in taxes (Goldman 2008, 120).

As a consequence, the state took control of Yukos. When Putin took office the state controlled 16 percent of crude oil production. Seven years later it controlled 50 percent (Goldman 2008, 99). Similar takeovers and the acquisition of oil stocks provided substantial revenues to fund new programs and modern nation building. For the period from Putin's election in 2000 through most of 2003 oil revenues fuelled increased personal incomes, paid foreign loans, increased

investment in manufacturing, decreased flight of capital and ensured the timely payment of wages (Riasanovsky 2005, 630). Interestingly, it was also found that several members of Putin's government held positions in the private sector and many of these were with energy companies.

Putin's effective muzzling of the oligarchs was extended to the media. After the 2000 presidential election Putin unveiled a new press policy. He decreed that, while he "believed in the principle of free press", the state would not permit the media to become a source of "disinformation" or a tool for anti-state entities (Riasanovsky 2005, 630). Both Gusinsky and Berezovsky were private media owners of television networks, newspapers and magazines, who began as Putin supporters but quickly became outspoken opponents. Gusinsky was compelled to forfeit his media holdings to Gazprom, causing the television journalists to "flee" to Berezovsky's TV-6 until it too was forced from the air in 2002 (Riasanovsky 2005, 630). Journalists had to learn to censor themselves in order to survive, thus contributing to a growing lack of media diversity. Soon the state's message became the *only* message, as little controversial news reached the public. The opposition parties had no voice because they had virtually no access to media outlets.

This was Putin's Russia. With so much power concentrated in the hands of the president and the state, many western observers anticipated that Putin would remain in office by ignoring or overriding the constitutional term limit. Instead, he surprised many when he appointed a successor and prepared to step down.<sup>21</sup> As if to not disappoint expectations, Putin did not step far as he stood for the post of prime minister in the 2008 elections and won. This position allows him to maintain substantial popularity among Russians and, many contend, to continue to run the country.

Ultimately Putin's leadership was born from a failure of structure and a flourishing of agency. Putin's ability to consolidate and grow his power base is an example of failure of structure. Even nearly a decade after the collapse of communism, Russia still possessed weak political institutions, underdeveloped social representation and an underdeveloped party system (Sakwa 2008, 90). The Russian constitution is written in a manner that fosters strong leaders and encourages centralized government. It offers insufficient checks and balances for those in power. Both a vigorous opposition and a stronger civil society would assist in keeping both the president and the Kremlin in check.

Agency usually thrives when structures are weak. This was the case with Putin. Much of this chapter has illustrated how Putin accumulated strength. The

weak structures facilitated the consolidation of power and allowed him to restructure the government, the parties, a portion of the private sector and the legal system, etc. in a fashion that suited his own aims. This strength of agency also lends to the response to another question: is Putin an elected *caudillo*? Of course he is. There can be no doubt that he governs Russia in accordance with his personal agenda. Fortunately for the Russian population this is in accordance with their longstanding penchant for strong personalist leaders (Sakwa 2008, 90).

Even though Putin lacks Chávez's charisma, his determination to strengthen Russia and redefine that nation's place in the world varied little from Chávez's plan for Venezuela. Putin's sense of nationalism caused him to strive to restore Russia's place in the world order. The sacrifice of democracy in Russia is an unfortunate "by-product". However, Putin was never a proponent of western style democracy.

The question of delegative democracy in Russia must take Putin's strength of leadership into account. Russians chose a strong leader and allowed him to govern in accordance with his vision for the nation. When Putin was elected in 2000 Russians polled were 71 percent in favour of a strong leader and 13 percent in favour of democratic institutions (Shevtsova 2005, 73). Initially, Russians chose Putin because he appeared to be so far removed from the sort of leader that

Yeltsin had been. Their craving for stability allowed him to govern at will. However by his second term Russians' attitudes toward democracy had begun to change. Twenty percent more of Russians polled wanted to "expand democracy among the public", compared to the 2000 results, and 15 percent more wanted increased democratization (Shevtsova 2005, 353). If this trend continues, Russians and their president will find themselves at odds.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Putin was appointed to the office of Prime Minister in August 1999 and was appointed President on 31 December 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Medvedev was elected president in March with the inauguration in May 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Here the term media is used in a broad sense to include members of the print, radio and television media.

<sup>4</sup> In 2005-2006 Russia imposed a strict embargo on Georgian products. The country was also cut off "by land, sea, air and rail" and deprived of natural gas supplies in winter (Traub 2008, 4). This was all in response to Georgia's plan to join NATO.

<sup>5</sup> Here Shevtsova combines a traditional definition of authoritarianism with what she termed Putin's "main source of personified power – the bureaucracy." (Shevtsova 2005, 324).

<sup>6</sup> Putin was trained as a lawyer at Leningrad State University. He was "accepted" into the KGB after graduation (Riasanovsky 2005, 625).

<sup>7</sup> Leningrad was renamed St. Petersburg in 1991. The latter will be the name used from this point forward.

<sup>8</sup> Putin considers Yakovlev a traitor for running against Sobchak as he, too, was part of the city's administration (Truscott 2004, 74).

<sup>9</sup> The FSB is the domestic successor to the KGB. The individual that Putin replaced concentrated on investigating business and banking processes (Truscott 2004, 88).

<sup>10</sup> Putin was the fourth prime minister in eighteen months.

<sup>11</sup> At the time of Putin's appointment there was widespread speculation as to Yeltsin's motivation. One possible reason was that it was known that he helped "spirit" Sobchak out of Russia to Paris under the protection of the FSB when Sobchak was faced with corruption and abuse of power charges in St. Petersburg (Shevtsova 2005, 32). This level of loyalty set a useful precedent for Yeltsin.

<sup>12</sup> There was no doubt that there was significant political and financial wrongdoing in Yeltsin's administration.

<sup>13</sup> In English Yabloko means apple.

<sup>14</sup> In Russian the party is called Yedinstvo.

<sup>15</sup> An oligarch is a Russian term for a small group of wealthy, influential individuals.

<sup>16</sup> Five of the seven appointees had direct ties to the KGB or FSB (Felshtinsky and Pribylovsky 2008, 172).

<sup>17</sup> This expenditure lagged behind that of the US and China substantially.

<sup>18</sup> The *siloviki* were trusted members of the security service and the military. Most originated from St. Petersburg.

<sup>19</sup> Roman Abramovich eventually sold a majority share of Sibneft to Gazprom (Goldman 2008, 123).

<sup>20</sup> At one point this was the largest privately owned oil company in Russia (Goldman 2008, 230).

<sup>21</sup> Medvedev had been president of Gazprom.

## Chapter Three

### Silvio Berlusconi

At first glance Silvio Berlusconi appears to be the outlier among the leaders examined in this thesis. Few observers would question that he is a democratically elected leader or that Italy is a liberal democracy. Certainly Italy is not a struggling Latin American country like Venezuela or an underdeveloped democracy like Russia. However, while Berlusconi may not be an authoritarian leader he has been described as a "narcissistic megalomaniac" (Stille 2007, 19). It is possible that, ultimately, this may prove to be the more dangerous type of leader to have. Berlusconi has served as Italy's prime minister on three occasions beginning in 1994. He was most recently elected with a substantial mandate in 2008. He is also the only one of the leaders included here to refuse to leave office after an election defeat.<sup>1</sup>

Berlusconi does not possess Putin's civil service background, nor does he share Chávez's military experience. He is an entrepreneur and media mogul turned politician and there are many who question his motivation for entering the political arena, as well as his ability to govern. The fact that he is a self-made multi-millionaire who appears to have endeared himself to voters who, at least

initially, believed that Berlusconi's personal financial success would translate into economic prosperity for Italy. Unfortunately, this has not been the case.

He first became prime minister at the advent of what was supposed to be a new era in Italian politics. The early 1990s in Italy saw substantial political upheaval in the wake of the *mani pulite* (clean hands) enquiries. These corruption investigations were launched by magistrates in Milan prior to the 1992 elections (McCarthy 1995, 2). As expected, it was found that corruption in the form of bribery and the "auction of power and position" were endemic and that the existing political system could barely survive without such elements (McCarthy 1995, 2). It should be noted that this was just one of many instances of political corruption to be uncovered in Italy.

The Milan magistrates issued a significant number of notices to appear before the investigation committee to many active and former politicians along with various private sector actors. Some of these individuals were tried and jailed. Two of the accused were closely tied to Berlusconi: his brother, Paolo, and his benefactor Bettino Craxi.<sup>2</sup> Several sources claim that Berlusconi's sole motivation for entering politics was to save himself from incarceration because, by late 1993, the magistrates were beginning to focus closely on the flagship of his empire – Mediaset (Stille 2007, 170).<sup>3</sup>

Part of the dispersal of political favours was the accepted form of power sharing among the established ruling political parties. For years Venezuelan democracy was held hostage by the Pact of Punto Fijo. Italy had the *Manuale Cencelli*. This was a mathematical formula that calculated the distribution of public offices based on the percentage of the vote attained by political parties. Because the Christian Democrats usually performed well, its members were usually appointed to the most coveted positions. Certain ministries were controlled by a particular party no matter what the election outcome while other government positions were subject to the rampant clientelism that existed in Italy during the post-war period.<sup>4</sup> This meant that from the end of the Second World War until the early 1990s Italy “failed to secure a genuine alternation of government” (Bull and Newell 2009, 42).

During 1992 and 1993, Italian politics was in a state of crisis as an entire echelon of politicians and their parties were swept from Italy’s political map. The ensuing electoral reforms were designed to “encourage political parties to form alliances in order to facilitate elections” (Shin and Agnew 2008, 3). This was supposed to foster two-party politics. It was in this weakened political party structure that Berlusconi created his party, *Forza Italia*, in November 1993 (Ginsborg 2005, 65). The party was the label under which Berlusconi’s brand of

politics would be marketed to the Italian public. After all the party's name is based on the football chant "Go Italy!", a catch phrase familiar to all Italians.

Berlusconi officially began his political career early in 1994 with a media blitz designed to assure victory in the upcoming March elections. He campaigned on a familiar platform of anti-communism, anti-corruption, economic liberalization, bureaucratic downsizing and reduction of government involvement in commerce and industry (Turner 2008, 705). There was not a single actual policy attached to any of these election promises. However, his appeal to a population exhausted by corruption scandals and failed policies was substantial. There was a void created by the destruction of the traditional political parties. Berlusconi sought to fill that void using every marketing ploy available.

Politically, Berlusconi allied *Forza Italia* with the unlikely combination of the *Lega Nord* (Northern League) and *Alleanza Nazionale* (National Alliance) in a centre-right coalition called the *Polo della Libertà* (Freedom Alliance). Despite the ideological disparity between these three parties the coalition won a majority of seats in the Chamber of Deputies. *Forza Italia* emerged with the largest share of the vote at 21 percent (Duggan 2007, 586). Berlusconi was sworn in as prime minister in May of the same year.

Allegations of corruption and conflict of interest against Berlusconi began almost immediately. By November 1994 the "clean hands" investigation targeted Berlusconi directly. Within a month the investigation into the prime minister's past business dealings caused the Northern League to withdraw its coalition support and led to a vote of non-confidence which Berlusconi lost. He was forced to resign in the wake of scandal after just eight months in office. President Oscar Scalfaro declined to call an election and instead appointed the former treasury minister, Lamberto Dini, as prime minister. Eventually Berlusconi was found not guilty of the allegations that ended his first tenure as prime minister.

Berlusconi's coalition lost the 1996 elections to *L'Ulivo* (Olive Tree) coalition. There are three factors worth noting in this defeat. First the centre-left parties spent their time in opposition reorganizing and gaining political strength (Ginsborg 2005, 72). The result was the Olive Tree Coalition whose leader Romano Prodi was considered a credible candidate for the prime minister's post. Second, Berlusconi spent his time out of office consumed by anger and a sense of betrayal which prevented him from enlarging his coalition, rebuilding relations with the Northern League or developing a strong political platform from which to launch a successful campaign (Ginsborg 2005, 71). To observers this wasted energy and inactivity only further detailed Berlusconi's lack of political expertise.

Third, Umberto Bossi the leader of the Northern League chose to campaign outside Berlusconi's coalition for the 1996 election. As that party garnered just more than 10 percent of the vote, this contributed to the centre-right coalition's loss.

Weak governing and poor policy implementation dogged the Olive Tree Coalition as the 2001 elections approached. The opposition mounted a vigorous campaign led with Berlusconi's trademark bluster. His command of the media and his personal wealth allowed the former prime minister to flood Italian households almost constantly with images and election rhetoric. He enjoyed substantial popularity across gender, class and geographic lines. This was something that previous leaders had been unable to achieve. Also, the newly formed *Casa delle Libertà* (House of Freedom) coalition was created in 2000 with the return to the fold of the Northern League.<sup>5</sup>

With promises of increased urban security, judicial reform and a clamp down on illegal immigration, Berlusconi's coalition was returned to office (Ginsborg 2005, 94). There was just a sixty-five seat gain in the Chamber of Deputies. Berlusconi was returned to power with more than 45 percent of the vote and a majority in both houses (Ginsborg 2005, 96).<sup>6</sup> The expectations of Italians were high. The prime minister presented his campaign promises in the form of a

“contract with the Italian people” and when he was unable to fulfill that contract Berlusconi’s popularity suffered (Shin and Agnew 2008, 99). Of course, the inability to fulfill the contract was not entirely Berlusconi’s fault. While he was distracted by further legal woes, there was both a domestic and a global economic downturn.

In 2006 the House of Freedom coalition was defeated by *L’Unione* (The Union) coalition led by Romano Prodi.<sup>7</sup> For three weeks Berlusconi refused to acknowledge the results of the election and remained in office. The margin of victory was slim with Prodi’s coalition garnering 49.8 percent of the vote over Berlusconi’s coalition at 49.7 percent (Shin and Agnew 2008, 113). This translated into a loss by roughly twenty-five thousand votes. Prodi’s government was to be short-lived.<sup>8</sup> The coalition fractured early in 2008. The Parliament was dissolved in February leading to an April election. The alliance led by Berlusconi’s *Popolo della Libertà* (People of Freedom) seized power with nearly 47 percent of the vote (Sassoon 2008).<sup>9</sup> This was approximately 9 percent more than the centre-left alliance led by Walter Veltroni. Thus, Berlusconi became prime minister for the third time.

Unlike Chávez and Putin there are no questions relating to the disappearance of Berlusconi’s enemies, no changes to the constitution to allow for

lifelong leadership, no outright attempts to block campaigning by the opposition, no violence and no adversarial relations with the West. The questions regarding Berlusconi's leadership are very different. Perhaps the biggest question targets his ability to lead and his motivation for doing so. Certainly such significant financial success in the private sector does not translate directly into political success but it does provide funding. Berlusconi's political motivation likely extends beyond his need for a career change or his desire to free Italy from the corrupt political system of the mid 1990s. It is even possible that the critics who suggest that he ran for office to avoid jail are correct.

Aside from the issues relating to Berlusconi's political motivation(s) there is speculation relating to exactly why he was elected. Some claim that it is due to his media monopoly but Berlusconi cannot legally bar political opponents presenting themselves or their platforms in any form of the media.<sup>10</sup> Certainly Berlusconi controls the majority of television media and a substantial portion of the print media in Italy but it is his business experience that provides him with his salesmanship, marketing savvy and experience in dealing with the public. In this way Berlusconi's business success contributes directly to his political success. He also enjoys full access to Mediaset, the staff who created and continues to market every aspect of *Forza Italia* as well as each election campaign.

Berlusconi also emerged onto the Italian political scene just in time to fill the void left in the early 1990s by the disintegration of the traditional political parties. To many he offered the only viable political alternative whose platform appealed to the public's sense of justice and future aspirations. According to one source he is "a magnet for those who are disinterested in national politics and who are concerned with issues only related to their own advancement" (Shin and Agnew 2008, 2). Like Putin, Berlusconi began his political career as the acceptable alternative following a period of crisis.

While it may not be the sole reason for his election, Berlusconi's media interests certainly placed him in the public eye and, along with his previous real estate endeavours, provided him with the financial resources necessary for attaining and maintaining political office. He became involved in television in the early 1980s because he was attracted to the "immediacy" of television and he saw an opportunity to make unprecedented profit (Ginsborg 2005, 32).

One must note that Berlusconi does not control or manipulate the media in the manner that Chávez or Putin have. Italian radio stations and newspapers are not shut down or taken over without explanation and prominent journalists are not found murdered in alleys or apartment stairwells. Berlusconi simply bought up media rivals.<sup>11</sup> When in government he did not embrace *Radiotelevisione*

*Italiana's* (RAI) coverage so he replaced its board of directors (Stille 2007, 297).<sup>12</sup>

During his time in the prime minister's office a number of Berlusconi's friends and supporters have taken up positions at RAI and other rival media outlets. An interesting incident occurred when an editor for *Corriere della Sera* was eventually fired for his unfavourable editorials relating to Berlusconi and his government. The prime minister used his influence to promise financial assistance to floundering Fiat if the editor was removed (Stille 2007, 295). Fiat's president was also on the board of the newspaper.

The prime minister's influence and his business dealings caused a myriad of legal distractions during Berlusconi's time in office. Questions of influence peddling and conflicts of interest came to light prior to the 1994 election campaign and continue today. The accusations range from outright bribery to controlling the media to the extent that political rivals were unable to obtain adequate airtime or receive fair treatment in the press. Berlusconi claims that he has endured "two thousand, five hundred hearings, nearly six hundred police interviews and spend almost one hundred and seventy-five million euro in legal fees" during his political career ("Berlusconi 'freed' ..." 2008).

Through all of this, "enough" voters consider Berlusconi's legal hardships relating to conflicts of interest, whether it is political or financial, to be "astuteness

and good fortune" which they hope will "rub off" on the average citizen (Shin and Agnew 2008, 2). Thus, when the government seeks to change laws or limit judicial power, a certain sector of the public perceives that these actions are for their benefit as much as for the prime minister's benefit. They do not consider Berlusconi's self-serving motivation.

His legal travails led Berlusconi to seek to discredit magistrates and to change laws to either halt prosecution or to limit magisterial power. Almost since taking office Berlusconi has accused the Milan magistrates of pursuing a vendetta against him and his business associates.<sup>13</sup> He refers to them regularly as "agents of the left" (Jacques 2009, 1).<sup>14</sup> Initially, in 1994, his time in office was insufficient to affect any sort of legislation to thwart the judiciary. However, in 2002 parliament passed new criminal reform legislation which critics claim was designed to help the prime minister avoid corruption charges (Turner 2008, 703). His 2003 corruption trial was halted based on this legislation but when the same legislation was found by the courts to be void in 2004 the trial restarted (Turner 2008, 703). Berlusconi was eventually acquitted later that same year.

In 2003 Giulio Tremonti, the Minister for the Economy, created a new amnesty for tax evasion of which Mediaset took full advantage (Stille 2007, 270).<sup>15</sup> It was not until July 2008 that hard fought immunity from prosecution laws took

effect. These laws “suspend all criminal cases against the prime minister, president and heads of both chambers of parliament while they are in office” (“Berlusconi ‘freed’ ...” 2008). Berlusconi is clearly more interested in protecting his personal business interests than he is in governing Italy. Neither Chávez nor Putin can be accused of being disinterested in state affairs. Berlusconi has, arguably, spent more time defending himself than he has governing Italy.

Unfortunately for Italians, Berlusconi’s Italy is not that dissimilar from Putin’s Russia or Chávez’s Venezuela in that a significant amount of power is concentrated in the hands of one man. How does this happen in an established liberal democracy? It is not difficult to achieve when literally “hundreds of members of parliament owed their positions directly” in some fashion to Berlusconi (Stille 2007, 270). These were largely individuals who once worked for him in some capacity in the private sector and who went on to run successfully for office or assumed appointments within government. These are not individuals who will side against their leader. This sort of loyalty coupled with Berlusconi’s sheer wealth make it nearly impossible for him to be defeated because what he does not already control he can purchase.

There are two issues that are important with reference to Chávez and Putin that hold much less significance for Berlusconi. These are constitutional change

and relations with the West. As Italy is considered a western nation its government is expected to maintain cordial relations with other western nations through organizations such as NATO, the European Union (EU) and the Group of Eight industrialized nations (G8). Conflicts among these nations are expected but they are also expected to be solved quickly and in a civil fashion.

Italy's current constitution was established in 1948. Berlusconi's centre-right coalitions have made no significant attempts to either rewrite or alter the constitution. It seems that the prime minister is more focused on reworking judicial powers than he is insuring a life-long term in office as was the case with Chávez. Two attempts at constitutional reform were made by Prodi's centre-left coalitions.<sup>38</sup> Neither was successful.

Like Chávez and Putin, Berlusconi's political successes are based in failure of structure and thriving agency. But structural failure in Italy is different than that of Venezuela or Russia. Italy possesses the necessary structure to insure democracy. When Berlusconi entered politics the weakest structural component were the political parties themselves. Otherwise, the constitution remained intact, there were no limitations on the existence or practice of political parties, there was no media censorship and, despite Berlusconi's interventions, the judiciary remains functional. Indeed Berlusconi's exuberant leadership style is kept in

check not only by the opposition parties but also by the other parties which make up his own coalition government. Significant conflict within the coalition may threaten the prime minister's hold on power if he is unable to placate his fellow party leaders. Civil society, interest groups and political culture continue to thrive in Italy and contribute to structural integrity.

Also like Chávez and Putin, Berlusconi is an individual with impeccable timing. He is another example of agency thriving in the face of poor or weakened structure. Had the existing political parties, those that formed the so called "First Republic", not been decimated by the corruption scandals and clean hands campaigns of the early 1990s Berlusconi would have had a less favourable opportunity to run for public office or to achieve a similar level of success. He already had sufficient government support and ties to various politicians to afford him the assistance that he required with any funding or issues of legislation that might arise.

However, the *mani pulite* scandals provided a unique opportunity for Berlusconi to build on his already substantial political influence. There were viable alternative politicians with greater political experience but Berlusconi became the most visible and most favoured among voters. Each of these three leaders was essentially the man in the right place at the right time. However,

Chávez spent more time and energy to advance his cause. He was willing to mount a military coup and endure prison. Putin accepted Yeltsin's offer to become prime minister. Berlusconi took advantage of a void left by scandal.

From Nero to Mussolini to Berlusconi, Italy has an unfortunate history with political leaders. In the post-war period a number of leaders served incomplete terms in office while others struggled with their own personal legal issues. Is Silvio Berlusconi an elected *caudillo*? He certainly does not represent the most negative aspects of the definition as depicted by Arnoldo Aléman and Daniel Ortega. However, he does represent the personalistic, charismatic aspects of the definition. His ambitions are limitless, he embodies the "arbitrary whim of the patron" and adheres to the "reciprocity of favours" (Ginsborg 2005, 119). He is determined to govern Italy in accordance with his personal vision for the country. However, despite surrounding himself with political acolytes, sufficient checks and balances are in place to insure that Berlusconi alone cannot dictate Italy's path.

The question of delegative democracy is easiest for Italy. This is not a delegative democracy: it is a liberal democracy. Despite Berlusconi's claims, Italians did not vote for the individual who would govern Italy as he saw fit. They also did not choose, as they had in the past, their own dictator. They simply chose

the individual that they believed would best govern their country and who offered a change from previous politicians. Italians keep voting for him likely because they perceive no strong, viable alternative. Berlusconi is a persuasive salesman who has had decades to perfect that craft.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> After the Olive Tree coalition won the April 2006 election under the leadership of Romano Prodi, Berlusconi refused to acknowledge the election results which he considered fraudulent. He did not resign until 2 May some three weeks after the election (Turner 2008, 706).

<sup>2</sup> A warrant was issued for Paolo Berlusconi's arrest in February 1994 (Duggan 2002, 295). The brothers shared many business dealings. Former Prime Minister Craxi (1983-1987) was Berlusconi's benefactor since the 1980s. His political ties and legislation eased the way for Berlusconi's burgeoning media empire. From exile he claimed that the investigations were little more than a "witch hunt" (Duggan 2007, 581).

<sup>3</sup> Mediaset was formerly Fininvest. This is the conglomerate that controls Berlusconi's business interests (Turner 2008, 705). In addition to his multiple media holdings, both print and television, Berlusconi was also involved in publishing, cinemas, retail and football with AC Milan.

<sup>4</sup> According to Patrick McCarthy clientelism is defined as "the plunder of the state by one or several political parties and the simultaneous use of the state to plunder the private sector" (McCarthy 1995, 2).

<sup>5</sup> Bossi eventually realised that he would only have real influence on government if his party rejoined Berlusconi's coalition (Ginsborg 2005, 87).

<sup>6</sup> *Forza Italia* attained the highest percentage of the vote for a single party at more than 29 percent.

<sup>7</sup> The Olive Tree coalition evolved into The Union coalition. Prodi remained at the helm.

<sup>8</sup> Prodi resigned in February 2007 when his foreign policy legislation failed to receive Senate approval (Turner 2008, 703). This legislation involved Italian troop deployments for Afghanistan. He subsequently resumed his post after winning a confidence vote. This time the government lasted just eleven months.

<sup>9</sup> The People of Freedom was created after the dissolution of *Forza Italia*.

<sup>10</sup> The Fairness Doctrine which was designed to prevent such occurrences was introduced in 2000. In practice *par condicio* means equal time.

<sup>11</sup> By 2009 Berlusconi owned three major television networks, controlled three other networks through the government and was the majority shareholder in numerous magazines, newspapers and publishing houses (Jacques 2009, 1).

<sup>12</sup> Until the mid-1950s RAI was known as *Radio Audizione Italiana*. Berlusconi accused the organization of being too left leaning when its coverage of him was unflattering.

<sup>13</sup> Berlusconi and a number of his associates have also been accused of maintaining ties to the mafia but little has been proven.

<sup>14</sup> Italian judges are aligned with particular political parties. It is because they do not separate themselves from politics that Berlusconi's claims seemed plausible to the average citizen.

<sup>15</sup> Tremonti was Berlusconi's corporate tax lawyer before entering politics. He was one of the hundreds of individuals who owed their new positions to their former boss.

<sup>16</sup> Italy's constitution dates from 1948. An attempt to create a new constitution was undertaken by Prodi's centre-left coalition in 1994 but this collapsed in deadlock after eighteen months in June 1998 (Turner 2008, 704). Another Prodi led government held a referendum on constitutional reform in June 2006. Almost 62 percent of voters were against reform.

## Conclusion

Chávez, Putin and Berlusconi were able to attain and maintain power due to the failure of a series of the structural components necessary for a successful democracy. Democratic structures in Venezuela, Russia and Italy were weakened prior to the election of their leaders. Venezuelan governments were rendered ineffective by a series of inept leaders and by pacts between parties. They were also mired in a series of economic crises. Russian governments had little democratic experience and Yeltsin was increasingly unreliable. Italian democracy was fairly strong but corruption was rampant among the political parties and the ensuing scandal emphasized the need for reform. These were the circumstances under which Chávez, Putin and Berlusconi were elected.

Since his election Chávez has faced a weak, poorly organized opposition that is unable to counter his popularity. Through a series of referenda Chávez has changed the constitution to allow him to serve as president for life. His acolytes serve in important positions within government and the judiciary. The media has been effectively muzzled as radio and television outlets are denied licenses to operate while some offices of the print media are closed. In Russia Putin left the constitution untouched while he, too, appointed former colleagues from the security service to influential government posts, restructured the judiciary and

impeded the ability of the opposition parties to present their political platforms to the public. Print and electronic media outlets were also closed. However, in this case individual writers, reporters and media personalities were the targets of extreme violence.

Berlusconi has not tampered with Italy's constitution. However, as with Chávez and Putin, his supporters occupy senior positions in government. Some of these individuals were elected to office while others were appointed to influential posts within the civil service. With a number of his supporters holding positions in the government-owned media the Italian prime minister has the most media influence among the leaders examined here. The opposition parties are weak and are unable to deal with Berlusconi's political style. He has an adversarial relationship with the judiciary which he regularly targets for reform. It is clear that the structural weaknesses between these countries vary significantly but it is the existence of several such weaknesses together which keeps these leaders in office.

"Government by a single – usually charismatic – leader, driven by personal ambitions and with little interest in building any institutions besides his own perpetuation in power ..." is how Close defined elected *caudillos* (Close 2004, 4). That is who these men are. Few would deny that Chávez or Berlusconi have voter

appeal because of their charisma. Putin is less obviously charismatic but he is no less popular.

Chávez is determined to liberate Venezuelans in the style of his hero Bolívar. In Chávez's case this means using the country's oil revenues to improve the lives of average Venezuelans while railing against the US. He established relations with other like-minded Latin American leaders in an attempt to create a zone of independence. He has a plan and a vision for the country.

During his time in office Putin made no secret of his plan to return Russia to its once mighty place on the world stage. He governed with a plan to achieve this though with limited success. Like Chávez he had power but he also has a plan for the nation and established programs and policies to fulfill the vision. The voting public in Venezuela and Russia elected and re-elected these leaders in accordance with the constitutions as strong individuals capable of achieving their goals.

Berlusconi is a powerful prime minister. That has already been discussed. However, despite his *contact with the Italian people* he has no definite economic plan and no "national plan to return Italy to greatness" (Jacques 2009, 2). His time in office is all about him and really not about Italy at all. So Italian voters elected and keep electing Berlusconi not because of his goals for the nation but because

they perceive no viable alternatives. His power varies from that of Chávez or Putin but this does not alter his elected *caudillo* status. They are interested in power and what they can gain from the manipulation of that power.

Obviously the same may be said of any political leader. However, few elected leaders enjoy this level of power in a political climate with insufficient checks and balances to counter their ambitions. The style of each of these three leaders is in line with a period of hyperexecutivism around the world. Probably, none of the actions undertaken either by Chávez, Putin or Berlusconi are anything that another world leader would not have done if he could have gotten away with it. However, western developed political culture and structure is stronger and better defined.

Megalomania and the cult of personality are two concepts which were encountered frequently with reference to these leaders. The former lacks a specific political definition but is defined clinically as "a symptom of mental illness marked by delusions of greatness, wealth, etc. or an obsession with doing extravagant or grand things" (Webster's ... 2001, 1196). It is not appropriate for individuals outside the clinical realm to judge the psychological well being of the leaders examined in this thesis. What these men possess is an exaggerated level of confidence in their own abilities and sufficient ego. This coupled with the political

climate and political culture of the countries in question gives the appearance of megalomania.

According to Scruton, cult of personality is a phrase that was established in Soviet Russia "to refer to the concentration of political power and authority in a person, rather than in the office which he occupies, accompanied by an enforced adulation of that person on the part of ordinary citizens, and massive propaganda designed to display his superhuman virtues" (Scruton 2007, 157). This definition was intended to describe the leadership of Joseph Stalin. Translated into modern political time, and without reference to Stalin, the concept of cult of personality could apply to Chávez, Putin and Berlusconi. Certainly in the case of Chávez and Putin, voters have been proven to choose the man over the office. Indeed, Putin was believed by some Russians to hold the office of president even after Dmitrii Medvedev assumed office. Berlusconi's popularity is more subject to his performance in office than the other leaders. Given the meaning of cult of personality it is possible to maintain that this might be a suitable political definition for megalomania.

It is because opponents, critics and observers view leaders such as those depicted in this thesis through the prism of western-style, liberal, pluralist democracy that Chávez and Putin become democracy destroying dictators while

Berlusconi is not. Viewed from this perspective alone Berlusconi could never be a *caudillo* and the way in which he governs Italy is acceptable. It does not matter that he has made political errors while serving as Italy's prime minister. However, any errors made by Chávez or Putin are examined under a microscope and they are all egregious. By accepting this model of democracy we ignore the local political vernacular, which allows leaders to be viewed as caricatures of the individuals that they actually are.

There appears to be a disconnect between the western stereotypical definition of democracy which would include nations like Canada, the US, Britain, France, Germany and Italy and those nations that do not follow this model precisely. It is as though observers are incapable of considering a leader and a government along with the model for democracy and the political culture of the nation in question. In 1997 Collier and Levitsky wrote an article entitled "Democracy With Adjectives". They write about the sheer number of adjectives needed to describe democracy in the modern world. These include: "illiberal, tutelary, oligarchical and restrictive" (Collier and Levitsky 1997, 440). Delegative would be another of the adjectives added to democracy to tailor the definition to a specific situation or set of countries.

The authors examine the need for "precising the definition of democracy by adding defining attributes" in order to "avoid classifying not entirely democratic nations as democracies" (Collier and Levitsky 1997, 442). Such classification would involve a broader definition of democracy which takes into account the specific attributes of the political culture of the nation in question. While several Latin American countries are included in this article, it is interesting to note that just one year before Chávez was elected to office Venezuela had yet to acquire an adjective despite many years of government turmoil.

Canache is correct in that it is "premature to claim that democracy has been established globally as the preeminent form of government" (Canache 2002, 1). Very few of the sources consulted for this thesis acknowledged that there may be any alternative form of democracy. Instead the authors are trapped by the western democratic stereotype that causes them to pronounce judgements on political leaders that they either do not understand or fail to recognize within the context of the political culture of the nation in question.

It does not matter that Chávez, Putin and Berlusconi do not govern exactly as would an ideal leader of an ideal democracy. What does matter is that each governs in ways that conform to basic democratic principles. That means that each is elected in accordance with the constitutions of their respective nations,

they are successful in multiple competitive elections, checks and balances on their power remain in place, there are few demonstrations demanding their resignations and civil society continues to thrive. It does not matter if democracy in Venezuela, Russia and even Italy varies slightly from the accepted norm. The voters of these nations have spoken and democracy will continue to require adjectives.

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